
The Impact and Implications of Textual Corruption on the Doctrinal Development of Absolute Monotheism in the Old Testament

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Abstract

Biblical writers weaved its theology and scribes standardized the text. Textual critics now admit that there are copious evidences of literary influences that reflect either the theological interests of the biblical writers or their inadvertent errors in the course of reproducing and transmitting the written traditions. This has been designated “textual corruption”. One of the means of this corruption is biblical redaction. Scholarly attention has not adequately focused on the implications of this phenomenon on doctrinal formulations that invariably shape religious perspectives. This paper discusses textual corruption/redaction of the Hebrew text. Exegetical, hermeneutical, redaction-critical and historical methods were used. The study establishes that textual corruption/theological redaction has implications for doctrinal formulation, such as the doctrinal development of absolute monotheism in the Old Testament. Such doctrinal development breeds religious particularism which often midwives religious intolerance/violence. Thus, religious adherents should promote religious dialogue/harmony by de-emphasizing exclusive uniqueness in favour of unity.

Keywords: Textual, Redaction, Corruption, Doctrinal, Monotheism, Old Testament.

Introduction

The Old Testament holds so much significance for the formulation of the doctrine of absolute monotheism. It is germane to mention that the three foremost monotheistic religions of the world are Judaism, Christianity and Islam; whereas,

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Judaism gave birth to the rest two. The theological dispositions and the interactions of these religions have affected, and are still affecting the world in terms of politics, economy, security, and the ethics and morality that govern human relations. One of the most significant aspects of the beliefs of these three religions is monotheism. The Hebrew Bible which is the text of Judaism could validly be regarded as the foundation of intolerant/absolute monotheism. This is because the other two rival monotheistic religions, Christianity and Islam, are offshoots of Judaism.

A cursory reading of the Hebrew Bible creates the impression that absolute monotheism was the pristine religious orientation of the Israelites. This tends to foreclose the possibilities suggested by textual evidence that the people evolved from a polytheistic culture and matured through henotheism into monolatry. The literature conveying the religious beliefs and practices of Israelites amply preserves the vestiges of polytheism and a progressive transition to a monolatrous religious culture. This is evident in the language of divine plurality and divine council scenes that inundate the Hebrew Bible. Gnuse (197) and Smith (97) have thought that monolatry is a more appropriate description for the early monarchical religion of the people of ancient Israel than the exclusive monotheism presently advocated in the Hebrew Bible. This implies a literary/textual retooling that anachronistically projected this new religious orientation.

The above statement draws attention to the question of historic-literary and theological development of the Hebrew text. Textual criticism has yielded results affirming that the Hebrew Bible as it is today is a product of a long process of literary tinkering with certain theological motifs. As Baldwin (par. 4) appositely noted, right from the beginning the literal text of the scripture has been a dynamic and fluid phenomenon; and this is in the sense that the literal words themselves have never been rigidly fixated but have been subject to changes from time to time. This phenomenon has been described as textual corruption (Wurthwein 107).

Against the above background, this study discusses the various dimensions of textual corruption with emphasis on redaction as the vehicle for the creation of the doctrine of absolute monotheism in the Old Testament. In doing this, the paper exegetically engages and hermeneutically explains some Old Testament passages randomly selected to portray the fact that ancient Israelites were not absolute monotheists from the beginning and also demonstrate that the doctrinal development of absolute monotheism has its roots in the theological review of Israelite religious history and tradition by biblical redactors; this is done within the frame work of redaction criticism.

Clarification of Concepts

Monotheism

Generally, monotheism in its contemporary understanding is “The belief that there is only one God, a supreme being who is transcendent, omnipotent, all good, and creator of all that exists” (Jenson 674). But in its elementary meaning, monotheism refers to the worship of only one God. Etymologically, the term is derived from two Greek words, namely, *monos* which means single and *theos* meaning god. This etymological origin supports its elementary understanding as the belief in and the worship of a single god. It is important to note that this elementary definition does not foreclose the acknowledgement of the existence of other gods. Monotheism in real terms appears to have meant monolatry originally. Monolatry derives from the Greek words; *monos* meaning “single” and *latreia* meaning “worship” and it refers to the permanent worship of a one God without overly denying the existence of other G/gods. Monolatry forecloses worshipping and sacrificing to any deity other than the chosen or adopted deity.

The use of the phrase “absolute monotheism” in this paper is deliberate, and the purpose is to draw attention to the fact that there are different forms and degrees of monotheistic expressions and this makes monotheism a pluralistic concept in terms of meaning. Monotheism could be liberal (relative), inclusive and tolerant or strict (absolute), exclusive and radically intolerant. Opting for a liberal understanding of the concept, Sommer (147) has posited that monotheism entails the notion that only one Supreme Being exists in the universe and his will dominates that of all other divine beings some of which may include those who live in heaven and are ordinarily or naturally immortal and are irredeemably subservient to the Supreme Being. He notes further that the latter may by an act of volition devolve some degree of power of control over some spheres and aspects of reality to them by allowing them to exercise some degree of free will. In the same vein, Opong (60) also viewed monotheism as a pattern of belief that presupposes the existence of only one Supreme Being who devolves power to his subordinate divine agents which enjoy substantial measure of autonomy but are yet accountable to the Supreme Being in the administration of the cosmos. Absolute monotheism, like that of the Old Testament as it presently appears, is exclusive and intolerant as it denies the reality of other gods and expresses intolerance to the religious traditions of other people. Liberal monotheism is oriented towards the principle of “live and let live” by acknowledging the reality of the Gods of other cultures and not expressing hostility towards them.

Textual Corruption

Textual corruption is the alteration of a text, which may be thematic, ideological or grammatical. It takes various forms and it occurs for various reasons. As the text of the Old Testament evolved, it was exposed to a number of distortions which were both deliberate and inadvertent. Textual corruption could be categorized into two forms. The first form which is obviously deliberate is associated with the stages of the collection, expansion and retooling of the traditions or the religious texts of the Israelites. Therefore, the deliberate textual corruption is often associated with theological motifs and this is mostly tied to the ambition of redactors. Hence, Omosor (4) observed with regard to the Deuteronomistic History that the text “in its finished form is an after-thought theological output”. The second category is associated with the stage of the standardization, reproduction and translation of the texts by the scribes. As regards this second category, Wurthwein (xiii) remarked that:

Almost without exception, the original documents have been lost. The texts are available only in copies separated from their autographs by several centuries and an unknown number of intermediary copies. We know how easily errors can occur in copying a text. By accident, a word may be missed or repeated, groups of words may be inadvertently transposed or replaced by similar or synonymous words, and if the handwriting is difficult to read, an element of guesswork may enter.

In this study therefore, textual corruption is used to refer to any form of deliberate or inadvertent distortion or alteration, whether literary, historical, theological, or otherwise that occurred in the course of the development, standardization and transmission of the Hebrew text as it appears today.

Redaction

Redaction is an editorial activity. Technically, a redactor is an editor of a text. Many texts go through the process of editing before it is put out for public consumption. In the conventional media, it is basically emendatory and the essence is mainly to improve the text for a better reading by removing errors. It is possible to edit a text without necessarily changing the line of thought or leading the audience out of the original ideas or thematic preoccupation of the text. However, it may sometimes lead to textual corruption as a result of conceptual and perceptual distortions if the major goal of the emendation is to recast a story and create a different

impression, mitigate its socio-political and/or religious adversity or to suit one's perspectives and bias. This is usually the case with the redaction of a religious text as it is usually theologically motivated. With regards to the Hebrew text, a redactor is an editor who uses earlier source materials and incorporates them into a manuscript. According to Ugwueye and Uzuegbunam (194), a redactor is an editor or a writer who conveys his (or her) theological disposition or that of his school or the community of faith at a given time by means of the altering and editing of pre-existing traditional material or text.

The major theological bent of the biblical writers (redactors) is the emphasis on the supremacy of Yahweh who alone deserves worship and by whom alone the redemption of humanity is possible and to whom alone the governance of the world is due because there is no other god/gods. This is the foundation of the absolute monotheism of the Old Testament. By this act of editing, the text is corrupted and readers who are far removed from the time and realities of the world of the original text to whom the redacted text comes down become susceptible to certain historical and theological constructs that would define their worldviews, beliefs and practices and shape their behavior, attitudes and philosophy of life.

Divine Plurality and Relative Monotheism (Monolatry) in Ancient Israel

It is important to describe the pristine religious culture of the Israelites so that one could better appreciate the redaction of absolute monotheism in the Old Testament. When the pristine religious traditions of the ancient Near East including Israel are closely examined, it would be discovered that there was the notion of divine plurality. Smith (21) and Day (15) are in agreement on the view that the Israelites shared in the polytheistic culture of the Semitic world, particularly Canaan. This is no longer a strange claim among modern biblical scholars. Thus, monotheism was only an evolutionary phenomenon in various cultures, which Gnuse (235) copiously illustrated in the case of Israel. Even when there was evolution towards a monotheistic orientation, it was a liberal, inclusive and tolerant form of monotheism.

There is ample evidence that the ancient Israelites evolved from a polytheistic background to become monolatrous monotheists. A few illustrations may suffice. The story of Jacob in which his wife Rachel stole her father's gods reveals that having idols was not a strange practice in Israel. With time, Israelite polytheism advanced into henotheism, which is the worship of one High God at a time as the head of the pantheon where many gods figure in a religious tradition. Such High God could be deposed and another promoted in religious

traditions. That this was the case in Israel is indicated in Psalm 82:1 which is believed to be a preservation of an early religious tradition in Israel. In that verse, we read thus: אֱלֹהִים נֹצַב אֶל־הַיָּהוָה בְּקִרְבֹּתָאֱלֹהִים יִשְׁפֹּט (God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment). According to Smith (58), the divine council (עֲדַת־אֱלֹהִים = 'adath-el) passages in the Old Testament preserve the vestiges of early polytheism in ancient Israel.

In all the divine council scenes, there is reference to plurality of gods (אֱלֹהִים) of which Yahweh was the chief God. In Gen. 1: 26 this idea of divine plurality is implied. Part of the text reads וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ וְיִרְדּוּ וְנִצְלְמֵנוּ – And God said, “let us make man in our image and likeness”. The cohortative נַעֲשֶׂה (let us make) and the phrase בְּצַלְמֵנוּ (in our image) bear evidence of the presence of other divinities with God. Allegorical interpretations suggesting angels (מַלְאָכִים, mal'akim) as description for those divinities with God in that scene have been offered by some scholars (Heiser, 2004). But such interpretation is speculative and unfounded when viewed against the backdrop of the pristine religious milieu of the Israelites. The Hebrew word for angels or divine messengers is מַלְאָכִים (mal'akim) with its singular as מַלְאָךְ (mal'ak). This reference does not occur in the verse in question. Nevertheless, referring to them as messengers equally puts God in the same class with the messengers. Also, even when the appellation “divine messengers” is accepted for the divine beings in that verse, it does not take away the status of subordinate gods or lesser divinities from them.

Similarly, the narrative in genesis 3 indicates early polytheism in Israel. In verse 22 we read וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים הֵן הָאָדָם הָיָה כְּאֶהָד מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וְרָע וְעַתָּה פֶּן־יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מִעֵץ הַיָּדָע וְיֵאָכַל וְהָיָה לְעֹלָם וְיִצְלַח מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וְרָע וְעַתָּה פֶּן־יִשְׁלַח יָדוֹ וְלָקַח גַּם מִעֵץ הַיָּדָע וְיֵאָכַל וְהָיָה לְעֹלָם. ‘Then the Lord God said ‘Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’. The phrase מִמֶּנּוּ לְדַעַת טוֹב וְרָע (like one of us) apparently refers to Yahweh and his fellow divinities or lesser gods who collectively discharged the duty of administering the affairs of the world.

Exodus 32: 1-6 narrates the event where Aaron molded calves as gods for the Israelites. Verse 4b of that passage is significant. It reads: וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר הֵעֵלִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם – ‘And they said, these are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt. Obviously, Moses in this verse was yet to firmly establish the worship of Yahweh or Yahwism successfully. The expression אֵלֶּה אֱלֹהֵיךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל (these are your gods, O Israel) suggests that Aaron did not make only one god for the people. This view is in consonance with the presence of

tribal gods in Israel owing to its tribal structure. The point is that Aaron's idea of making an image for the people or of the people urging him to do so certainly did not emerge from a vacuum. It was a reenactment of their ancient tradition which accommodated some sort of symbolic representation of deity with images.

In I Kings 22: 19-23 one reads about the divine council where יהוה (Yahweh) sat in the midst of the host of heaven (צָבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם) to deliberate the issue of Ahab and his prophets. The צָבָא הַשָּׁמַיִם (host of heaven) were the members of the divine council who ruled with him. Prominent among them was one simply introduced as הַרוּחַ (The Spirit). McGinn (107) thinks that 'The Spirit' in that text is one of the regents of יהוה (Yahweh) which is in tandem with the view of Rose (67) that the hosts were royal dignitaries who were not mere servants of יהוה (Yahweh). Job 1: 6 presents another example of divine plurality in Israel. The verse reads: וַיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיָּבֹאוּ בְנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים לְהִתְיַצֵּב עַל־יְהוָה וַיָּבֹא גַם־הַשָּׁטָן בְּתוֹכָם (Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan also came among them). The mention of בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים (The sons of God or sons of the gods) has hermeneutical significance. They are to be understood as divinities assigned various functions in the cosmos that probably came to present account of their engagements. That הַשָּׁטָן (Satan) was in attendance is catches one's attention significantly. The likely apologetic view is that הַשָּׁטָן (Satan) was an impostor intruding into the council meeting of God; but such understanding has no basis in the text, because he was rather presented as a regular member of the divine court and as one of בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים (The sons of God). Boda (13) posited that הַשָּׁטָן (Satan) was a prosecutor whose duty is to prosecute and convict anybody who infringed on the divine law and mete out punishments accordingly. הַשָּׁטָן (Satan) also featured in Zech. 3: 1-10 in the same capacity to prosecute Joshua the High Priest. Boda (14) held that הַשָּׁטָן (Satan) is not the Devil depicted in the New Testament or an adversary in the Old Testament, but rather he is a prosecuting counsel in Yahweh's divine court.

The few cases of divine plurality in ancient Israel mentioned above point to early polytheism. Yahwism was a monolatrous religion as it advocated the worship of only Yahweh but did not overly deny the existence of other gods. This is understandable from various texts such as II Kings 18: 4, Exodus 20: 2-5, Joshua 24: 15, among numerous others. It is theologically curious to read in II Kings 18: 4 that the bronze serpent (called Nehush'tan) which was dedicated to *Asherah* and to which the Israelites were burning incense up to the time of King Hezekiah was

actually made by Moses, the Yahwist and Law giver. This gives credence to the claim that the people worshipped a plethora of gods probably with the understanding that there is always a higher God (henotheism). The attachment to Yahweh was as a result of his show of power for redemption as a divine warrior. This is implied in Exodus 20: 2-5 which presents some hermeneutical profundity. There is an implicit acknowledgment of the reality of other gods even as Yahweh canvases that he alone should be worshipped (monolatry). It is clear from verses 3, 4 and 5 that the reason why Yahweh alone should be worshipped is not because he alone exists or the only true God, but rather because he was the one that delivered the people from Egyptian captivity. Verse 5 unequivocally states that Yahweh is a jealous God who would not tolerate disloyalty or shared loyalty from a people he delivered. Joshua 24:15 did not ignore this fact. After a review of the salvific interventions of Yahweh in the life of the Israelites, Joshua appealed to their conscience and sense of justice as he rhetorically charged them to choose to serve Yahweh alone.

The foregoing illustrations serve to emphasize that the notion of absolute monotheism was originally not part of the Israelite religious consciousness. That the denial of other gods assumed theological prominence in the Old Testament is the result of textual corruption owing to the redactional activity of biblical writers who were more or less theological historians.

Background to the Development of the Hebrew Text

An understanding of the history and development of the Hebrew Bible is vital for a dynamic reading and interpretation. The Hebrew Bible has a long and complex literary and theological history behind it. It is important to observe that the text began as oral traditions. There were traditions about the people of Israel and these traditions were multifarious. Scholars such as Flanders et al (45) have enlightened that while these traditions were kept in different places and among different circles in ancient Israel over time, the traditions were transmitted orally with slightly different slants and strands of the traditions were collected and written down in fragments at some points in their historical development mainly from the time of the monarchy. As Ugwueye and Uzuegbunam (198) rightly stated, source critics have identified these traditions which encapsulate the history and the theological foundations of ancient Israel as the Yahwist, Elohist, Deuteronomic, and Priestly (JEDP) materials as popularized by Julius Wellhausen in his famous documentary hypothesis. Thus, it was from these fragmented sources (manuscripts) that the history of ancient Israel was constructed. As at the time of the monarchy when literary

activities started to flourish, there was a rich repository of both written and oral traditions available for writers to draw from.

The traditions of Israel were tribal in nature reflecting the peculiarities and experiences of the various confederating units or tribes. The fragmented materials were collected around small units of memory in order to ease and facilitate their transmission. The memory units reflecting the life situations of the people were associated with certain historic or cultic events such as the exodus event. As time passed, the events assumed concrete meanings and significance. These were not without the biased perspectives of some key figures that influenced the thoughts of others. Gradually, the stories with their emphatic theological and historical colourations were refined. In line with these observations, Flanders *et al* (23) asserted that:

By this slow process of historical refinement Israel found a means for expressing her covenant faith. Superficial items were eliminated; the important was emphasized; the precise word was selected. Some stories which probably circulated among other peoples were transformed into vehicles to express Israel's faith in God.... Collections of materials of similar nature were continually made and existing collections were being expanded. Just as a great historical tradition was gathered around the small credo of Deuteronomy 26: 5-10, so were collections of laws, songs, prophetic utterances, and wisdom materials made by individuals or groups who were particularly interested in each of these types of literature.

Thus, Israelites' literature gradually began to assume its definite form as materials with age long theological values were pieced together and the community of faith gradually gravitated towards the acceptance of these writings as authoritative corpus containing the inspired word of God. Originally, the books of the Old Testament were penned on leather-like scrolls known as parchments or on papyri. The book form which replaced the cumbersome scrolls did not appear until about the third-fourth century A.D. Due to several feats suffered by the Israelites in the hands of their neighbours particularly during the exile and the repeated destructions of their Temple and places of treasure, there was loss of the original manuscripts which triggered a process of recovering the original texts by the post-exilic scribes and custodians of Jewish traditions.

Meanwhile, there were variants of the Old Testament used by different groups of Israelites. One of those variants is the Samaritan Pentateuch which was the only Scripture accepted by the Samaritans and had different readings in many instances. There is also the Hebrew Bible (Dead Sea Scrolls) used by the group of Israelites who withdrew into the Dead Sea area of the Qumran Community during the inter-testamental period of Israelite history, which was discovered much later by biblical archaeologists. These two texts of the Old Testament show significant variations from the present Masoretic Hebrew Bible. More so, the present Hebrew Bible that is generally accepted also has different versions with variations. The work of Wurthwein (56) comprehensively captures these texts and versions and their variations and his insightful observations will be helpful to this study in the following section on textual corruption in the Old Testament.

All along, there was conscientious effort at dealing with the textual problems associated with the text in the process of its interpretation, preservation and transmission. Gaurion (par. 8) informed that the text was fixed around the second century A.D. before the book (Codex) form began to appear, noting that this, nevertheless, shows a wide gulf of time not less than one thousand years away from the time of the original autographs of the writers of the Old Testament manuscripts. This fact points to the vulnerability of the text to distortions (corruption). This was evident in the literary activities of both the scribes who were instrumental in shaping and standardizing the text as it appears today.

Textual Corruption in the Old Testament

There are two forms or categories of textual corruption in the Old Testament. The first category involved the priests and scribes who were not only historians but also theologians whose theologico-literary activities began in the pre-exilic period and spanned through the exilic to the post-exilic era. Biblical redactors belong to this category. The second category involved the Jewish scribes who were basically post-exilic textual critics and custodians of the Jewish religious tradition who sought to establish the original text and in the process of their literary activities, some inadvertent mistakes or deliberate revisions of the text were made. Because the major interest of this study is the redaction of the Old Testament as it affects the concept of monotheism, the discussion in this section begins first with the second category while the illustrations of monotheistic redaction as textual corruption follow.

1. Textual Corruption Resulting from Scribal Errors

As literary activities blossomed among the Israelites, the scribes reproduced the manuscripts manually. This was done by two methods. One of the methods is the copying of the manuscript personally by hand. The second method is by reading of the manuscript to a number of other scribes who penned down what was read to them. Both methods led to textual corruption as errors occurred. While the former was slower and less productive but more accurate, the latter led to mass production of the text within a short period of time but it was more prone to errors. According to Keener (69), the process of these two methods involved three approaches or types: (a) literal word-for-word copying (b) copying of thoughts, which involves the extraction of the essential contents of the exemplar and (c) interpretative copying, which amounts to the alteration of the words and thought of the text. The errors that emanate from the reproduction of the text have been classified into four broad categories thus: (1) errors of sight (2) error of hearing (3) deliberate alteration and (4) errors arising from textual inclusion of marginal notations. The first two types of errors are more common in the Old Testament and both are errors of reading and writing. A few illustrations of these errors will suffice to make the point. The errors as listed by Wurthwein (108) on the basis of his comparison of the variant readings of the book of Isaiah in the Masoretic text and the Qumran text are abridged as follows:

(i) **Confusion of Similar Letters:** Several of this type of errors occurs in the Hebrew text. In Isaiah 28: 20 you have כְּהִיטְכָנֶס (kehitekane) while the reading in the Qumran text is בְּהִיטְכָנֶס (behitekane). The Hebrew letters כ (k) and ב (b) are quite similar. Thus, the copyist must have made error of sight. This may automatically change the meaning of the words in both texts or create some ambiguity that may result in a guess of meaning and eventual semantic invention.

(ii) **Transposition of Letters:** This occurs when a scribe mistakenly places letters in the wrong order. In the Masoretic text, Isaiah 9: 18 has נֶטָם (ne‘tam) while the Qumran text has טָעַם.

(iii) **Haplography:** This happens when there is a cluster of similar letters or words and one of the letters or one of the pairs of the similar words is omitted. In the Masoretic text, Isaiah 5:8 בַּיִת בַּיִת (bayit bayit = house by house) while the Qumran text has בַּיִת בַּיִת (bayit beyit = house house?). Also in the Masoretic text, Isaiah 26: 3ff has בְּכָה בִטְחָה (beka bitucha, bitechu = (he) trusts in you. Trust ...) while the Qumran text reads בְּכָה בִטְחָה (beka bitechu = in you trust). In the latter, the verb בִטְחָה (bitucha = (he) trusts) is hurriedly omitted to verse 4 which begins with the

imperative (command) אִנְחֹל (bitechu = Trust). Such omissions definitely create translational problems.

(iv) **Omission by Homoioteleuton:** This type of error occurs when the scribe omits a word because it is close together with another word that is similar in form, identical with it or have identical ending. Example in the Masoretic text, the word יָמָם (yomam =) occurred in verses 5 and 6 but in the Qumran text the same word in verse 5 was omitted as the eye of the scribe passed from it to the one in verse 6. Such omissions create some problems in translation as it casts a veneer of doubt on the text.

(v) **Errors Caused by Deliberate Alteration:** This error is founded mainly upon the theological disposition of the scribe less on syntactic necessity. Before the standardization or establishment of the Old Testament, there was room for alterations. This usually happened on occasions where a scribe found certain expressions to be theologically offensive, demeaning or inadequate to support certain practices and he undertook to retool it either by expunging some words, phrases or even a whole sentence or expression or by interpolating the text with some words, phrases or sentence. An example of this is found in the Samaritan Pentateuch where a command to build a sanctuary on Mount Gerizim was added after Exodus 20: 17, which is not found in the Masoretic text (Wurthwein 111). This is the major basis for the redaction enterprise of Old Testament writers as will be discussed in the next section. This type of error could also occur where the copyist feels that there is improper grammatical structure and seeks to edit it or where he thinks that there is need for clarification and decides to offer explanations. In this case, certain words such as וְ (and), כָּל (all), אֲשֶׁר (which, that or whom), לְ (for, to) among others could be inserted in the text.

(vi) **Inclusion of Marginal Notations and Glosses:** Some manuscripts had marginal notations that reflect the scribes' thoughts and sense of meaning. During the reproduction of the texts, such notations were obviously added to the main body of the text. Examples of this could be found in I Kings 18: 19 which refers to the 400 prophets of Astarte (Asherah) and the 450 prophets of Baal. In verses 22 and 40, there is no mention of the four hundred prophets of Asherah as only the prophets of Baal are mentioned. Textual critics like Wurthwein (109) have pointed out that the fact of not being mentioned in those verses is an indication that it was not part of the original text but an addition to verse 19 either from marginal notation or glossary, because verses 22 and 40 where they were mentioned should have been more important if it was

part of the original text. The fact that some English translations of verse 19 render it differently as prophets of the groves (KJV) instead of prophets of Asherah heightens the suspicion that it might not have been clearly written in the original text. Another case in this category of textual corruption is found in I Kings 8: 6 where you have קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים (Holy of the Holies) beside the earlier original expression דְּבַיִר הַבַּיִת (shrine or sanctuary of the house). קֹדֶשׁ הַקְּדוֹשִׁים (Holy of the Holies) is not only syntactically incoherent but also an awkward expression in that context, an indication that it was an added glossary or marginal notation.

2. Old Testament Redaction as Textual Corruption: The Case of Absolute Monotheism

As mentioned earlier, the Old Testament as it has come down to the modern readers bears marks of redaction. As the text evolved, the emendation became imperative to accommodate the unfolding realities associated with the world of the Israelites particularly in terms of their covenant relationship with Yahweh in the context of their existential experiences and relationship with other nations. Moses had founded Yahwism which became the hub around which the nationhood of the Israelite revolved. As the elect of the redemptive warrior God, Yahweh, the Israelites thought of themselves as primarily, if not the only objects of Yahweh's benevolence and redemptive actions or wondrous historical interventions in the affairs of humanity. Thus, other peoples were meant to be subordinated to them as other gods were also subservient to Yahweh. In line with this new orientation, the polytheistic tendencies of the Israelites must be stamped out completely as the people express unalloyed loyalty to Yahweh alone. Meanwhile, the Messiah that would conquer and rule the world was to come from them through the Davidic dynasty. However, historical and political realities appear to contradict their understanding, abort their expectations and threaten them existentially, particularly with the exile.

Owing to these prevailing circumstances, the motif of the transmitters of their traditions is to interpret history and realities religiously with an orientation towards theodicy; for Yahweh is the author of history, the determiner of all events, an invincible and the only true God who deserves absolute obedience, total submission and unadulterated worship, failure of which would fetch calamity for the nation of Israel, as was the fate of the heathen, even though the Israelites were his chosen people. This triggered the phenomenal review of the religious traditions of the Israelites which stirred them away from the act of acknowledging the existence of other gods to an absolute and intolerant monotheistic orientation. At this point, it is imperative to refer to a few

cases of textual corruption that occurred as a result of the theological bias of the scribes who redacted the text to express their views.

Deut. 32: 8-9 presents clear evidence of textual corruption occasioned by the tendency of redactors to obliterate the fact that Yahweh was originally a tribal deity. As this author has adumbrated in a related study, a comparative reading of verse 8 in the Masoretic text and the Greek version of the Old Testament (Septuagint) reveals some variations with serious theological implications bordering on the concept of monotheism (Omosor 134). It should be noted that textual critics are in consonance on the fact that the Greek version of the Old Testament proves to be a more accurate representation of the original Hebrew manuscript than the Masoretic text. Here are the two various readings:

- a. **Masoretic Text:** בְּהִנָּחַל עֲלֵיוֹן גּוֹיִם בְּהִפְרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם יִצַּב גְּבֻלֹת עַמִּים לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Translation: When the Most High gave nations their homes and set the divisions of men, he fixed the boundaries of peoples in relation to Israel's numbers (JPS Hebrew-English TaNaKh). The King James Version reflecting the reading in the Masoretic text also reads "When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of Adam; he set the bounds of the people according to the number of the children of Israel".

- b. **Septuagint Text:** בְּהִנָּחַל עֲלֵיוֹן גּוֹיִם בְּהִפְרִידוֹ בְּנֵי אָדָם יִצַּב גְּבֻלֹת עַמִּים לְמִסְפַּר בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים

Translation: When the Most High gave to the nations their inheritance, when he separated the sons of men, he fixed the bounds of the peoples according to the number of the sons of God (Revised Standard Version reflecting the reading in the Greek version of the Old Testament).

From the readings of the two versions, the following observations are made. The Masoretic Text reads בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (children or sons of Israel) while the Septuagint Text reads בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים (sons of God). It is widely acknowledged that this text in question preserves an old Israelite tradition regarding the supremacy of אֵל (God), also known as עֲלִיּוֹן ('Eliyon, the Most High), over all other divine beings in the cosmos. In this text, he is portrayed as the Supreme Being who delineated the boundaries of nations and allotted peoples or nations to different divinities or gods. The phrase בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים (sons of God) as used in the Hebrew Bible mostly refers to divinities in the pantheon, court or council of אֵל (God) as could be found in Job 1:6; it rarely refers to God's children as human beings. The earth was divided into nations according to

the number of the gods or divinities in the cosmos. Verse 9 states that the portion (חֶלֶק) which יהוה (the Lord) received was Jacob (יַעֲקֹב), his people (עַמּוֹ), as his inheritance or allotment (נַחֲלָתוֹ). It is insightful to note that Jacob in the Hebrew Bible is an eponym for Israel as a nation. This symbolic representation owes its origin to the theophanic experience of Jacob at Peniel (Gen. 32: 23-31) where his name was changed to Israel and his sons would later become the twelve tribes of Israel (Omosor 135).

The fact that יהוה (the Lord) received inheritance from אֱל (God) or עֲלִיּוֹן ('Eliyon, the Most High) must have been theologically offensive to the Yahwist scribes. Thus, the alteration in the Masoretic Text was meant to erase such impression from the text. Hence, בְּנֵי הָאֱלֹהִים (sons of God or divine beings), was replaced with בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל (children or sons of Israel). When the exegetical context of verse 8 is closely examined, it would be clear that the reading in the Septuagint is original. בְּנֵי אָדָם (sons of men or children of Adam) in the verse literally refers to the people of the earth, which were delineated into different nations (גּוֹיִם) of the earth – the people's bounds were fixed (יָצַב גְּבֻלַת עַמִּים).

It is illogical to state in line with the Masoretic Text that the nations were separated, demarcated or fixed based on the number of the children of Israel; instead, it is more acceptable hermeneutically to reason that the nations were delineated according to the number of the divinities to oversee them. This hermeneutical position is corroborated by the kenite theory which links the provenance of Yahweh to the Kenites in Midian where Jethro the father-in-law of Moses introduced the deity to his son-in-law, Moses who popularized Yahweh in Israel after leading them out of Egyptian bondage (Mondrian 34). The original God of the Israelites was אֵל (*El*) with Yahweh probably being one of the divinities under him (Smith 13).

Another indication of monotheistic redaction in that verse has to do with the translation of אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*). אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*) which is morphologically plural in Hebrew grammar. Its singular is אֵל (*El*). Semantically, אֱלֹהִים (*Elohim*) occurs as a singular when it refers to the Israelite God, whereas when it is used in relation to the gods of other nations it retains its appropriate meaning as gods in the Old Testament (see Deut. 4: 32-33). In Psalm 96: 5 one reads כִּי כָל-אֱלֹהֵי הָעַמִּים אֱלֹהִים וַיהוָה שְׁמַיִם עָשָׂה (For all the gods of the peoples are idols, but the LORD made the heavens). כָּל-אֱלֹהֵי (all the gods) in this text acknowledges that other people also had their Gods or gods; but the writer also uses the same word אֱלֹהִים for idols in his quest to depict Yahweh as the only true God, as no other being qualifies for the title. Also, in Exodus 6:3,

יְהוָה is rendered as Almighty in reference to the God of the Israelites; while the same word in its plural form אֱלֹהִים is used to qualify the gods of other nations as demons. That such translational variations exist is a proof of textual corruption owing to the theological motifs of the Yahwist scribes who undertook a review of the text at various points to entrench the exclusiveness of Yahweh to the effect of denying other gods.

Many scholars believe that the redaction of the Hebrew text was carried out by a number of persons described as Deuteronomistic historians (Person, 34, Doorly, 10). Rumney (2) averred that:

The Deuteronomistic writers drew on disparate sources, oral and written, linking them with their concern over the question of theodicy. The question these historians raise, most likely in the context of national defeat and exile, is what the history of Israel's failure means in light of the promises embodied in its covenant theology (Mosaic and Davidic). The paradox is captured in 1 Kings 9: 8b; "Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this house?"

The redaction of the Old Testament took a long process with each age reflecting the realities and the perspectives of the people at various stages of their history and development. Thus, there were theological shifts from time to time. Person (7) used the term "school" to refer to a group of persons bound together by common ideology as historians who redacted the written traditions of Israel. He further explained that they were:

A scribal guild that was active in the Babylonian exile and Persian period and had its origins in the bureaucracy of the monarchy. The members of this school, the Deuteronomic scribes/redactors, were trained in this school and may have been involved in the instruction of others. They preserved and reinterpreted earlier material...within their particular theological and literacy tradition. Thus, the Deuteronomic school had a common ideology that was expressed in a common language, even though changes in ideology certainly occurred over time as social conditions changed.

The redaction of the Old Testament was premised on the theological need of Yahwist scribes, priests and even the prophets to inspire the people of Israel to unalloyed loyalty and devotion to Yahweh (Doorly 85). Yahwism which was more or less a monolatrous religion was introduced by Moses who led the people of Israel, and all those who became part and parcel of

the nation as citizens by means of ethnic assimilation, into a covenant relationship with Yahweh, a warrior God that liberated them from the Egyptian bondage. The Exodus tradition and the heroic and salvific interventions of Yahweh had become a cliché in the theological history of the Israelites. It was characteristic for the ancient world to interpret events and developments religiously. Thus, blessings and curses, success and failure, victory and defeat, among other realities were theologically presented with the formula of cause and effects (Omosor 1-2). Even wars between nations were conceived as rivalry between the deities or gods of the warring nations. Yahweh through his covenant had promised to be the God of the Israelites who would always deliver them from troubles and offer them a Messiah that would usher in the reign of peace and dominion through the Davidic Dynasty.

The catastrophic fall of Israel in 721 B.C.E was interpreted by the pre-exilic theologians who were likely contemporaries of King Josiah of Judah as a punishment for the sins of idolatry committed by the people from the time of Jeroboam. This inspired the Josiah's reform and the emphasis on total submission to Yahweh. But Judah would go the way of Israel for they were equally exiled to Babylon in 586 B.C.E. With Jerusalem conquered and the Temple of Yahweh in ruins, the people would ask what had become of the promises of Yahweh and the faith of Israel. The theological redactors opted for a theodicy to explain that all that befell the people was the result of their disobedience. According to Doorly (85), following the total fall of Israel and Judah, the exilic redactor concluded that the catastrophe was a retribution served them for their unfaithfulness to Yahweh. Hence the people would have to admit their guilt and turn completely to Yahweh and acknowledge him as the only true God for them to be restored.

Against this theological backdrop, the biblical redactors would undertake a comprehensive review of the religious history of Israelites in order to obliterate the notion of divine plurality (polytheism) and inclusive, relative or tolerant monotheism (monolatry). This is the foundation of the monotheistic redaction of the Old Testament.

The Socio-Religious Implications of Monotheistic Redaction

Sacred texts are influential phenomenon in human life. Doctrines jump out of the sacred texts and such doctrines stereotype the lifestyle of the followers of that particular religion and shape their perspectives about reality. This is irrespective of whether the text has been properly preserved and transmitted or properly read and interpreted in its original context or not. The religious text which comes down to the community of faith from the distant past is usually prone

to distortions and amplifications which are often times theological and this is received by the community of faith who enlivens the text by translating its theological precepts to doctrines that govern their life in the world. This is what Baldwin (2014) meant when he talked about the reciprocal influence of text and Church in the evolution of sacred scripture.

By the act of theological emendation, the text is corrupted. Also, by such theological redaction, certain religious doctrines that would have enduring and far reaching effects on humanity and human relations could develop. This is the case with the absolute monotheism of the Old Testament. Today, expressions of absolute monotheistic views lie at the heart of the inter-religious disharmony plaguing the world. As Ayantayo (57) noted, it is when religious groups lay claim to absolute truth to the condemnation of other religious truths that crisis ensues. This is because the adherents have been so indoctrinated that they would prefer to die in the course of defending their faith rather than accommodate or tolerate the religious views of other people who are not members of their faith.

Religious adherents are often passive receivers of doctrines. Even majority of the clergymen who preach these doctrines and impact them on the adherents are trained dogmatically so that they become conservative in their application of the text. The notion of absolute monotheism breeds religious particularism which culminates in religious intolerance and violence. This is because each religious group believes that the God or gods of other religions are false. Conceptions about God have affected the way people conceive the society because it is believed that the society is by God's ordinance and sacred texts provide the lens through which a community of faith or a group or sect of religious faithful view social, economic and political realities. So, if religious texts have been theologically interpreted or misinterpreted and presented in such a way that the thread of ontological unity is cut and the oneness of humanity is broken, humanity and the society become doomed with all sorts of existential threat. Disharmony, mutual distrust, intolerance and violence are the haul marks of religious particularism and extremism which are founded on the notion of exclusive or absolute monotheism.

When the expression of monotheism becomes extreme, absolute and intolerant, it becomes difficult for religions to interact harmoniously. In a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society such as Nigeria, mutual distrust is heightened as members of the contending religions scheme and maneuver to dominate others within the socio-political and economic space. Thus,

religion becomes a negative socio-political and economic tool. As Ahmed-Hameed (84-85) stated, this creates negative atmosphere that hampers peaceful inter and intra group relations, harmonious religious interaction and also impedes national consensus and derails the nation's sense of direction on critical issues. This is the bane of development in Nigeria. Various forms of religious violence to massive destruction of lives and properties have bedeviled the nation. The principle of equity and fairness is sacrificed on the altar of religious bigotry.

Conclusion

The scribes had overbearing influence on the theological perspectives of the Old Testament. In the course of reproducing and transmitting the text, various forms of errors crept into it. While some of the errors were deliberate alterations, some of them were also unintentional. The unintentional errors may not have had significant effect on the doctrinal or theological content of the text because such errors bordered mainly on orthography, except where notations or glosses with significant theological implications were inadvertently incorporated. The premeditated alterations hinged on theological motif. This deliberate alteration mostly took the form of redaction in which case some themes, ideas and details were either imputed to the text or expunged so as to serve the theological perspectives and religious inclinations of the writers. This amounted to textual corruption. This is the case with the idea of absolute monotheism.

The notion of absolute monotheism was born out of such textual corruption that resulted from theologically motivated redaction. Ancient Israelites were not originally absolute monotheists. At best, their form of monotheism, Yahwism, was monolatrous because while it advocated that only Yahweh should be worshipped, there was the notion of divine plurality as evident in the existence of divine council as well as the acknowledgment of the reality of the gods of other religions and nations as attested by expressions such as *אין־קמוך באלהים* (there is none like you among the gods).

However, the unpalatable experiences of the Israelites in which they constantly came under the siege of other nations, especially the Babylonian exile, warranted the review and reinterpretation of their covenant relationship with Yahweh, their fate and eschatological expectations. The theological writers opted for a theodicy which explained their woes in terms of their apostasy and disloyalty to Yahweh. This became the theological hub around which the redaction of the text revolved. The exilic writers would then obliterate the notion of divine plurality and heighten the notion of Yahweh's exclusivity. Hence, expressions such as *אין אלהיה*

בְּכֹל-הָאָרֶץ כִּי אֵם-בִּישְׂרָאֵל (there is no god in all the earth but in Israel) and אַתָּה אֱלֹהִים לְבַדְּךָ (You alone are God) were theological strands imputed to the text by redactors. This created the doctrine of absolute monotheism which has now become the bane of interreligious harmony due to particularism, discrimination, intolerance and the attendant violence.

Religious dialogue and harmonious relations is only possible if the adherents of the contending religions would objectively understand the nature of religion and the human divisive influence on the interpretation of the concept or doctrine of absolute monotheism. By this understanding, they would promote religious dialogue and harmony by de-emphasizing exclusive uniqueness of any of the religions and stressing the essential unity of all religions and this would impact positively on the social, political and economic life of the society.

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